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# Cuyahoga Valley National Park

## Draft White-tailed Deer Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

#### **Why is a Deer Management Plan needed?**

Cuyahoga Valley National Park (park) began to address the issues associated with excessive deer numbers and browsing impacts over 20 years ago, and since then has been conducting studies of both deer density and the effects of deer browsing on park resources. Deer density has varied and has decreased in many areas of the park in recent years, but there are large annual fluctuations, and the densities remain above the levels that are considered desirable for forest regeneration. Long-term ecological studies at the park have found that deer browsing is limiting the growth of tree seedlings, and suppressing the growth of native groundcover. A deer management plan is needed to ensure that deer do not become a dominant force in park ecosystems, causing unacceptable adverse impacts to native species and other park resources.

#### **How many deer are in the park?**

Recent estimates of deer density across the park indicate an average of 41 deer/ square mile (1,669 deer). Deer densities reached a high point in 2002, when they were estimated up to 142 deer/ square mile in one area of the park. Numbers have decreased overall in the last 10 years, but still remain at a level that can cause adverse ecological impacts.

#### **What does NPS think is the “right” number of deer?**

Plan success is not measured by the number of deer but on the success of forest regeneration. Therefore, the “right” number of deer will be determined based on the ability of forest to regenerate. The park has identified a range of 15 to 30 deer per square mile as the initial deer density goal for this Draft Plan/EIS, which was based on review of relevant scientific studies on the effects of deer on vegetation, and the management approaches used in other local parks.

#### **Have deer herd reductions by the Metroparks districts affected deer populations in the park?**

Deer reduction efforts on non-federal properties within the park boundary undoubtedly reduce deer populations in those locations and may have influenced decreasing population trends in adjacent locations within the park. However, most of our deer population survey routes do not coincide with locations where deer reduction has occurred, and deer densities on park land remain at levels that can cause adverse ecological impacts.

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## What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

An Environmental impact statement (EIS) is a detailed report prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for federal actions that may significantly affect the quality of the human and natural environment. An EIS provides agency decision-makers and the public with assessments of the environmental consequences of potential federal actions. The ultimate purpose of an EIS is to assist in decision making; to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment.

## Where are we in the EIS process?

We are now providing the Draft Plan/EIS for a 60-day public review and comment period, beginning July 26, 2013 and ending September 24, 2013. This EIS process began in September 2006, with publication of a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register. Public scoping meetings held in October 2006 allowed the public to provide input on our stated goals for the plan and the issues that could arise through its implementation. Using the feedback we received during that initial public scoping effort and input from a team of scientists convened to inform the planning process, we developed a range of management alternatives for meeting those goals. The general schedule for completing the Draft Plan/EIS is below.

### Estimated EIS Project Schedule

<b>Public Review and Comment on Draft Plan</b>	<b>July – Sept 2013</b>
<b>Analyze Comments/ Prepare Final Plan</b>	<b>Fall/Winter 2013/2014</b>
<b>Release Final Plan/EIS</b>	<b>Summer 2014</b>
<b>Record of Decision/ Implementation of Plan</b>	<b>Fall 2014</b>

## What alternatives are being considered for managing deer?

The Draft Plan/EIS considers four alternatives for the management of white-tailed deer at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

*Alternative A (No Action)*, existing management actions would continue, including deer and vegetation monitoring, data management, and research.

*Alternative B (Combined Non-lethal Actions)* would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would incorporate a combination of nonlethal actions, including use of large-scale deer fencing for the purposes of forest regeneration. In addition, reproductive control of does would be used to restrict population growth when this technology meets certain criteria.

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*Alternative C (Lethal Actions)* would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would add lethal deer management actions (sharpshooting with firearms or capture and euthanasia of individual deer) to reduce the herd size.

*Alternative D (Combined Lethal and Non-lethal Actions)* is the NPS preferred alternative, and would include all actions described under Alternative A, and would incorporate a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions from Alternatives B and C. These actions would include the reduction of the deer herd through sharpshooting with firearms or capture and euthanasia and reproductive control of does to maintain the population.

### **Why was public hunting not analyzed as an alternative?**

Hunting is not allowed in a national park unless it was specifically authorized in the park's enabling (or subsequent) legislation. The law establishing Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now National Park) as a unit of the national park system was passed in 1974 and did not authorize hunting. Therefore, public hunting was dismissed from detailed analysis in the Draft Plan/EIS.

### **Have other National Park units prepared white-tailed deer management plans?**

The issues related to impacts of high white-tailed deer populations are not unique to Cuyahoga Valley National Park. This is an environmental concern throughout the eastern United States. Deer management plans/EISs have been completed and are being implemented in the following eastern parks:

- Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Porter, Indiana)
- Catoctin Mountain Park (Thurmont, Maryland)
- Rock Creek Park (Washington, DC)
- Valley Forge National Historic Park (King of Prussia, PA)


### **Where can I get a copy of the Draft Plan/EIS?**

A digital copy of the Draft Plan/EIS can be downloaded from the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web site at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuvadeerplan>. A limited number of hard-copies will be available at the park; copies may be picked up in-person or may be obtained by making a request in writing to Superintendent, Attn: Deer Management Plan, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 15610 Vaughn Road, Brecksville, Ohio 44141. Copies will also be available at some area libraries.

### **How will the public have input?**

A 60-day comment period began July 26, 2013 and will close on September 24, 2013. Public comments can be submitted electronically through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuvadeerplan>, or in writing to Superintendent, Attn: Deer Management Plan, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 15610 Vaughn Road, Brecksville, Ohio 44141.

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Members of the public will also be able to comment on the Draft Plan/EIS at one of the two scheduled public meetings.

- **Public open houses** will be held on August 14, 2013 from 1-3 p.m. and from 6-8 p.m. at Happy Days Lodge, 500 W. Streetsboro Road, Peninsula, OH 44264. The public will have the opportunity to comment on all aspects of the Plan/EIS. The public can comment at the meeting or submit comments electronically or by mail by September 24, 2013.

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